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Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations

Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/45 of 7 December 2001, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-seventh session a report on the implementation of the resolution. The report covers activities undertaken since the previous report (A/56/390) by the departments, programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations in cooperation with the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF).

The report concludes that cooperation between the United Nations and the OIF was further strengthened during the period under review through an increasing number of activities undertaken jointly, taking into account their comparative advantages.

* A/57/150.

** The present report is based on information received as at 20 August 2002.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/45 of 7 December 2001 in which the Assembly invited the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps, in consultation with the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF), to continue to promote cooperation between the two organizations. The General Assembly also invited the specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations, as well as the regional commissions, including the Economic Commission for Africa, to collaborate to this end with the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie by identifying new synergies in favour of development, in particular in the areas of poverty elimination, energy, sustainable development, education, training and the development of new information technologies. The General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations to submit to it at its fifty-seventh session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period since the last report of the Secretary-General. It reviews the main initiatives and activities undertaken by the United Nations system and the OIF in the context of their cooperation on preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-building and in the promotion of economic, social and cultural development.

II. Political cooperation between secretariats

3. As in previous years, the OIF participated in the fifth high-level meeting between regional organizations and the United Nations convened at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 30 April to 2 May 2002. At that meeting the two organizations agreed to continue to develop their cooperation and, where appropriate, to undertake joint action, especially in efforts to promote conflict prevention and democracy.

4. The United Nations and the OIF also agreed to institute regular consultations and exchanges of information and reviews of lessons learned in order to enhance the success of future efforts in the area of conflict prevention. To that end, they decided to develop a repertory of experiences and measures that could facilitate successful preventive initiatives. Furthermore, the United Nations and the OIF agreed to continue the practice of organizing periodic meetings and/or consultations between their respective representatives or envoys involved in peace missions. They also decided to explore the joint organization of a workshop on early warning and conflict prevention for representatives of regional and subregional organizations in Africa. Francophone junior professional officers financed by the OIF through its programme, Jeunes experts francophones, are currently working in the Department of Political Affairs.

5. As part of the implementation of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi (Arusha Agreement), the United Nations Office in Burundi and the OIF, which maintains an office in Bujumbura through the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, have initiated a series of activities aimed at consolidating peace and reconciliation in the country. These activities include the promotion of the rule of law, the participation of citizens and civil society in conflict management, and the strengthening of the media.

6. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/45, the United Nations Office in Burundi and the OIF jointly assisted the Government of Burundi and civil society in carrying out a number of activities. To promote the rule of law, the two institutions worked closely in the following areas: (a) preparation of a continuous training programme for high-ranking public officials aimed at building managerial capacities in the day-to-day management of the public service; and (b) training of paralegal members of the Association of Women Lawyers, whose function is to promote law in rural areas. In addition, the following three activities were carried out to promote press pluralism: (a) a feasibility study, commissioned by the Minister of Communication and the Minister of Education, for the reopening of the journalism school, the ecole de formation en Journalisme et aux métiers de la communication audiovisuelle; (b) organization of training workshops for journalists; and (c) assistance to the Ministry of Communication to prepare and organize a consultation forum. The OIF has also contributed towards the costs of a study trip by members of the National Assembly of Burundi to countries that have experienced problems similar to Burundi's, such as Mozambique and South Africa.

7. Close cooperation between the United Nations and the OIF in the Comoros helped to bring the peace process initiated by the Framework Agreement for Reconciliation, signed in Fomboni on 17 February 2001, to a positive conclusion and led to the end of the secessionist and constitutional crisis. The ceremony of investiture of the President took place on 26 May 2002.

8. In the area of electoral monitoring and assistance, the Electoral Assistance Division and the OIF carried out the following activities: (a) OIF observers were among the international observers who worked in coordination with the United Nations during the April 2002 presidential elections in the Comoros; and (b) the Electoral Assistance Division and the OIF undertook regular consultations and exchanges of information on the electoral processes. It is anticipated that these consultations will continue with a view to strengthening cooperation between the Division and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

III. Cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fields and with the programmes and funds of the United Nations and its specialized agencies

9. In addition to strengthening cooperation between secretariats in the political area, United Nations programmes, funds and agencies, several of which have separate cooperation agreements with the OIF, have continued their cooperation in the economic, social and cultural fields.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

10. In mid-2002, the OIF made a contribution to the Small Island Developing States Network (SIDSNet), which made it possible to implement the Indian Ocean regional information management component of the project. Beginning in September 2002, a regional information officer will be recruited and hosted by the Ministry of Environment of Mauritius. SIDSNet is establishing a regional presence by emphasizing capacity-building for sustainable development information in the small island developing States regions. This new collaboration with the Government of Mauritius will enable stakeholders in the small island developing States to be well informed on issues related to the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of small island developing States. It will also encourage interregional networking, the sharing of experiences between small island developing States and the development of their global agenda.

11. Following the Hanoi Summit held in 1997, the OIF, through the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie (AIF), established an associate experts programme consisting of sponsorship of young professionals from French-speaking developing countries. During the period under review, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries benefited from the services of an associate expert specialized in a variety of issues related to development in Africa. The International Organization of la Francophonie associate expert programme, which provides an opportunity to the organizations of the United Nations system to recruit competent young francophone professionals, should be strengthened and expanded.

12. During the period under review, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries participated in two seminars organized by the OIF in the context of the promotion Senghor programme organized for the 2002 class of young professionals sponsored by the OIF. The first such seminar concerned the link between culture and development (March 2002), and the second was on francophonie et l'etat de droit (April 2002). Both seminars were relevant to the Office's ongoing work on culture and development, as well as to the priority areas of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Department of Public Information

13. The Department of Public Information continued its collaboration with the OIF, which began in 1998, with the organization of the fourth in a series of training seminars on the use of the Internet as a tool for development. The week-long seminar, organized by the Department and the Institut francophone des nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la formation (INTIF) at United Nations Headquarters in April 2002, in collaboration with the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie, brought together some French-speaking members of African permanent missions to the United Nations. It resulted in the creation of web site projects and in the posting of new web sites by francophone missions on the United Nations server.

14. An Internet-based discussion group entitled "Franconu", established in 2000 for seminar participants, continued to serve as a vital forum for the exchange of information on the development of the Internet in French and on the experiences gained by the participants regarding the use and development of Internet web sites. Its membership expanded with the registration of the participants of the April 2002 seminar.

15. The OIF continued to sponsor an expert in the web site section specializing in informatics and new information technologies, financing his post for a second year, following a specific agreement with the United Nations. This expert, who began working in May 2000 and concluded the arrangement in May 2002, contributed to the development of the United Nations web site in French and to the creation of tools required for maintaining the site's databases, search engine and statistics.

Economic Commission for Africa

16. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/45 of 7 December 2001, and following the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2000, the OIF has provided funding to hire a young professional to work in the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa. The main tasks assigned to the young professional are to help strengthen cooperation between the Commission and francophone member States by communicating any relevant information that might be of interest to them and to improve the relationship with francophone media with a view to enhancing their involvement in coverage of activities carried out by the Commission.

17. The OIF has continued its support to the Commission in terms of promoting a broad high-level participation of francophone countries in Commission-sponsored conferences and development activities. The OIF played an active role in the third African Development Forum held in March 2002, under the theme "Defining priorities for regional integration". In addition, the OIF will be fully involved in the Commission's forthcoming Joint Conference of African Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Economic Development and Planning scheduled to meet in October 2002 in South Africa. The OIF and the Economic Commission for Africa continue to explore other areas of cooperation and are currently looking for ways and means to further enhance this mutually beneficial partnership.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

18. In 1995, UNICEF and the OIF signed a cooperation agreement specifying the measures to promote collaboration between the two organizations, especially in the fields of girls' education and children's rights. The OIF has been a traditional and strong advocate for children in the francophone world. UNICEF looks forward to attending, as an observer, the next Summit of Heads of State and Government that use French as a common language, which is to be held in Lebanon, as well as to working with the OIF as a partner in follow-up to the special session on children, which was held in New York from 8-10 May 2002.

United Nations Development Programme

19. During the period under review, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the OIF continued their cooperation in Benin, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania and Rwanda. The United Nations system and the OIF also strengthened their partnership in Togo, supporting the Government's efforts by funding and establishing educational radio broadcasts. The OIF also participated in the joint financing of the project entitled "Réseau de développement durable" by providing additional computer equipment. In the context of the project entitled "Renforcement des capacités de gestion", the OIF supported the implementation of such programmes as the training of lawyers. Experts of the United Nations system and the OIF often hold briefings and debriefings following their respective missions in order to exchange information and experiences.

20. The United Nations Development Programme, the OIF and the European Union coordinated their efforts in support of the electoral process in Togo. This assistance, which was suspended in March 2002, was specifically aimed at providing technical support to the National Independent Electoral Commission and to the coordination by the United Nations of international electoral observers. UNDP will continue to strengthen its cooperation with the OIF in the areas of eliminating poverty, combating HIV/AIDS, broadcasting educational radio programmes, and providing training, capacity-building programmes in management and support for governance.

21. In Guinea, UNDP worked closely with the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie during the preparation of a round table on the private sector that took place from 21 to 23 May 2002. The OIF provided funding for the hiring of a national consultant who prepared a key document on trade issues. The round table also provided an opportunity for investors and entrepreneurs from 12 countries as well as multilateral and bilateral donors to hold constructive discussions. During the two sessions devoted to negotiations on projects and other types of cooperation, more than 250 separate meetings were held between Guinean entrepreneurs and foreign investors, and 168 letters of intent were signed.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

22. In December 2001, the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) participated in a workshop in the context of a joint Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie/International Trade Centre programme entitled "Fonds d'intégration des pays moins avancés (PMA) membres de la francophonie au commerce mondial" and presented its vision of and input to the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries to delegates of French-speaking least developed countries. Discussions are ongoing between the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie and UNCTAD on the possibility of organizing training sessions and preparing studies on cultural industries in the francophone countries.

23. In 2002, ongoing cooperation between UNCTAD and the OIF included the organization of a second intensive training course for francophone African countries to assist negotiators in analysing and negotiating international investment agreements. The course, organized in collaboration with the World Trade Organization and OIF's Université Senghor, took place in Alexandria, Egypt, from 27 May to 6 June 2002. It was the first training course organized by UNCTAD since the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar. Twenty-one negotiators from 19 francophone countries of the region, as well as from Haiti and Cambodia, participated. In addition, efforts are under way to organize another round of bilateral investment treaty negotiations between least developed countries and capital-exporting countries. This event, which will be financed by the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie, is being organized at the request of several of the least developed countries. It is scheduled to take place in Geneva from 4 to 13 November 2002.

24. Following the signing in 1999 of a cooperation agreement between the OIF and UNCTAD, the OIF funded the work of two experts from developing countries that are members of OIF. The experts worked in UNCTAD's Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities for a period of two years.

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

25. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) collaborates with the OIF, through the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie, in the implementation of several projects, including the following:

(a) The international civil service training programme run by the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie and UNITAR in collaboration with the Paris-based National School of Administration and the International Relations Institute of Cameroon. The programme is designed specifically for national officials from specialized ministries of French-speaking developing countries and French-speaking countries from Eastern Europe. The seven-month training programme familiarizes participants with international public administration, international law and the United Nations system. It also introduces them to practical communication skills and new information technologies. Instruction is given in Yaoundé, Paris and Geneva over a period of four months; it is supplemented by three-month internships in international organizations.

(b) UNITAR's Environmental Law Programme offers correspondence instruction in international environmental law. The course is available in English and in French; the French version was developed with the support of the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie. Furthermore, several training workshops for the application of environmental law aimed at French-speaking countries have been carried out with the support of the Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie. In 2002, subregional workshops were organized for West Africa and for the French-speaking

countries of the Indian Ocean region. Two national capacity-building programmes will be developed in Madagascar and Senegal.

(c) An electronic distance-learning system for improving the efficiency of distance-learning mechanisms for international environmental legislation courses is being developed with the support of the Francophone Information Highway Fund.

(d) The OIF is one of UNITAR's main partners in its law and cyberspace project, which was set up to promote the development of legal frameworks favouring the development of the information society. The law and cyberspace forum is a discussion framework designed to address major issues related to cyberspace and multimedia law. The journal on law and cyberspace publishes articles on law concerning information and communication technologies in developing countries. Training workshops on the law and cyberspace are carried out in collaboration with local stakeholders. Project initiatives also aim at developing networks of experts in law related to information and communication technologies, based in developing countries.

(e) The Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie sponsored a junior professional officer who is currently working on the law and cyberspace project and on the World Summit on the Information Society.

IV. Participation in conferences organized by the United Nations system and OIF

26. The OIF participated in the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, and in the following: the special session on HIV/AIDS (New York, 25-27 June 2001); the special session on children (New York, 8-10 May 2002); the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (New York, 9-20 July 2001); the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002); the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 31 August-8 September 2001); and in the work of the preparatory commissions leading to these events.

27. The OIF was also represented at the following meetings: the Preparatory Commission of the International Criminal Court and the first meeting of the Assembly of States parties to the Rome Statute; the World Summit for Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 26 August-4 September 2002) and the meetings of its preparatory committee; the World Food Summit (10-13 June 2002); the meeting of the General Assembly on information and communication technologies for development, held on 17 and 18 June 2002, in preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society (scheduled for 2003 in Geneva and 2005 in Tunis).

V. Observations

28. **Following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 56/45, cooperation between the United Nations and the OIF has been further strengthened and extends to a growing number of areas of activity in which the two organizations have a shared interest. This cooperation is characterized by a clear awareness of the actors' respective comparative advantages and by a constant concern for complementarity. This applies in the political sphere, in which the OIF supports the work of the United Nations, and plays an increasingly active role in economic, social and cultural areas, in accordance with the objectives of the Charter of the International Organization of la Francophonie, adopted in Hanoi in 1997. The number and quality of the activities undertaken jointly by the United Nations system and the OIF are testimony to this effort. In addition, continued personal contacts and working meetings between United Nations and OIF officials should lead to enhanced collaboration, with a view to improving the efficacy of the efforts of both organizations.**